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Southeast Conference
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Interim Conference Minister (ICM) Reflections

I've chosen a new title for what I intend to be regular communications to readers of the Southeast Conference Connection: ICM reflections. ICM seems fitting in this new world of UCC acronyms. Within the National UCC we have entities known as: WCM, LCM, JWM, CHHSM, IB, CAIM, COREM, UCAN,

PB, UCF, OGHS, and CPR – the latter also being located in Atlanta, near our SEC Office and in the parsonage of one of our SECUCC congregations. And many of these different settings of the UCC have their respective CEO, CFO, and most importantly that person who doesn't fit into an acronym: the Executive Assistant or Administrative Assistant or other such titles … the person who keeps each respective setting humming and who knows all of the details (and skeletons) that are a part of that organization.

So I have enjoyed getting to know and work with our Executive Assistant: Gerri Ryans-Hudson! And with her help I'm slowly getting to know all of you and the various pieces of the puzzle which make up SECUCC. And I am the **ICM** - important to stress because it means that I am the **Interim** Conference Minister; I'm here to bridge the gap until SEC decides its next steps into an uncertain future, but as your interim I won't be with you for the long haul. This means for me that I have to remain focused on how I can best be helpful to you; or in other words, I need to practice triage with my time.

I've been immersed in this interim task for about a month now, and already its clear to me that this conference has a rich history and has been challenged over the years by the complexities inherent with the diversity of the different strands of heritages that came together to form the Southeast Conference. It has also been challenged all along to survive financially. These challenges continue, but more significant to me are the opportunities that lie ahead. I sense that those who have been closely involved in the life of the conference realize that there are many new things emerging here. But you may not realize how just how numerous and significant those things are – both for the future of this conference and region but indeed for all of the United Church of Christ and for mainline Christianity.

Among the new things I have discovered so far in SEC are the following: your new PATHWAYS theological education program, your new website, your capital campaign to transform churches and lives, your Commission on Ministry (COM) working to model its future after the National UCC division that works with conferences on matters dealing with ministers and congregations (Ministerial Excellence, Support & Authorization … also known as MESA), your new Church Starts, and your newly affiliating congregations from other backgrounds. There is an exciting spirit in the air here – God is not only still speaking among you but leading you to new ways of being the Church in this new century.

So far I've been able to experience several points of New Church with attendance at worship of our Praxis UCC in Atlanta and UCC Pensacola. I have also worshiped with two of the historical congregations in the Atlanta area: Central Congregational UCC and First Congregational UCC. Praxis and Pensacola are experimenting with new forms with substance, and both were wonderful experiences for me. And Central and First are living out deep traditions with new dimensions – again wonderful worship experiences.

I chose to attend First Congregational in particular last Sunday because I wanted to be in touch with the rich history of civil rights in that congregation and in this region — particularly with the history of Dr. Martin Luther King and the many who were a part of the movement he led, including leaders and members of many of our SEC congregations. Rev. Dwight Andrew's sermon was titled: When Rules Get in the Way – a message intimately linked to these words written by Dr. King while he was in prison: "I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells

him is unjust, and willingly accepts the penalty by staying in jail to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law."

I will continue to ponder these words as I work among you for they are related to the basic challenge the Church faces today: how do we honor the traditions we have inherited while at the same time allowing God to work among us to bring in that which is new and exciting and life-giving? May God be with us as face this challenge together!

– Peace & Blessings, Randy

P.S. If you wonder about all of the acronyms I used in the beginning of this message, I invite you to explore for yourself in the National UCC website: ucc.org and in our SEC website:secucc.org. In doing so you will experience something like I have been experiencing in this first month among you – it's like putting a puzzle together!

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About Randy Hyvonen

After 18 years of conference ministry in Ohio, Pacific NW, and Montana-North Wyoming, Randy retired in 2011. Recently he's was lured back into service by the opportunity to help the Southeast Conference "bridge the gap" as it looks for a new Designated Conference Minister.

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Oct 18

All Day - Women's UCC Southern Regional Conference

Oct 26

9:00 AM - Member in Discernment/Exploration Fall Retreat

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